

ENCOUNTER

1

The following information is for the Dungeon Master's eyes only!



COMBAT READY

Read the *Introduction to Combat* supplement before you begin. Also, copy or sketch out the maps of the Stonehill Inn (pages 2 and 4) for players to refer to during the game.

KING UNDER THE HILL

This encounter is a great introduction to the game. Players can use the four pre-created characters or create their own at dndbeyond.com/characters/builder.

PLAY TIME 1-2 HOURS

ENCOUNTER OVERVIEW

At the heart of the bustling mining town of Phandalin is the Stonehill Inn, a roadhouse that plies its trade from folk drawn to the frontier by the promise of gold. Its proprietor, Toblen Stonehill, built the inn over the ruins of a much older structure: a barrow built by Phandalin's original settlers. Toblen doesn't know that deep beneath his inn, just under where his ale cellar is now, a long dead chieftain lies buried.

Scheming powers of evil have set their sights on unearthing the chieftain's remains and stealing his funereal treasures. In the dead of night, they send their minions, a ring of devious cranium

rats, to overwhelm the inn and dig down to the hidden grave. The adventurers unwittingly enter soon after the rats' initial assault. While the cranium rats hold Toblen and his guests prisoner upstairs, swarms of lesser vermin tunnel through the cellar floor to locate the long-lost grave.

ENCOUNTER GOALS

To complete this encounter, adventurers must kill or drive out all the monsters in the inn. Don't reveal this goal up front; let the players uncover it for themselves.



As DM, it's your job to describe the scene, ask the players "what do you want to do?" and then explain what happens next. It often helps to ask specific questions like, "How do you enter the inn? Do you go through the front door, or enter through the courtyard?" If your players seem unsure what to do, prompt them with more questions. If players encounter the halfling hiding in the privy, do they question him? If they encounter the rats in the kitchen, do they run or fight?

BEGINNING THE ENCOUNTER

The encounter begins when the characters seek shelter at the Stonehill Inn during a storm. Set the scene by reading the following boxed text:

To escape a downpour, you make for the warmth of the Stonehill Inn, a popular roadhouse in the mining town of Phandalin. As you approach, you notice something odd: warm lights shine from within, but no laughter or music can be heard.

STONEHILL INN FEATURES

Normally a sanctuary of warmth and good cheer, the Stonehill Inn has been quietened by the arrival of the rat swarms. The following features are common throughout.

Furnishings. Inside the inn, everything looks hastily abandoned. Chairs have been upturned and drinks spilled in the panic to escape.

Ceilings. Ceilings throughout the inn are eight feet high and flat, crafted from thick oak timbers.

Doors. Doors are made from thick, sturdy oak. None of the doors are locked, and most internal doors stand ajar.

Light. The inn is brightly lit by oil lanterns mounted on the walls or propped on tables.

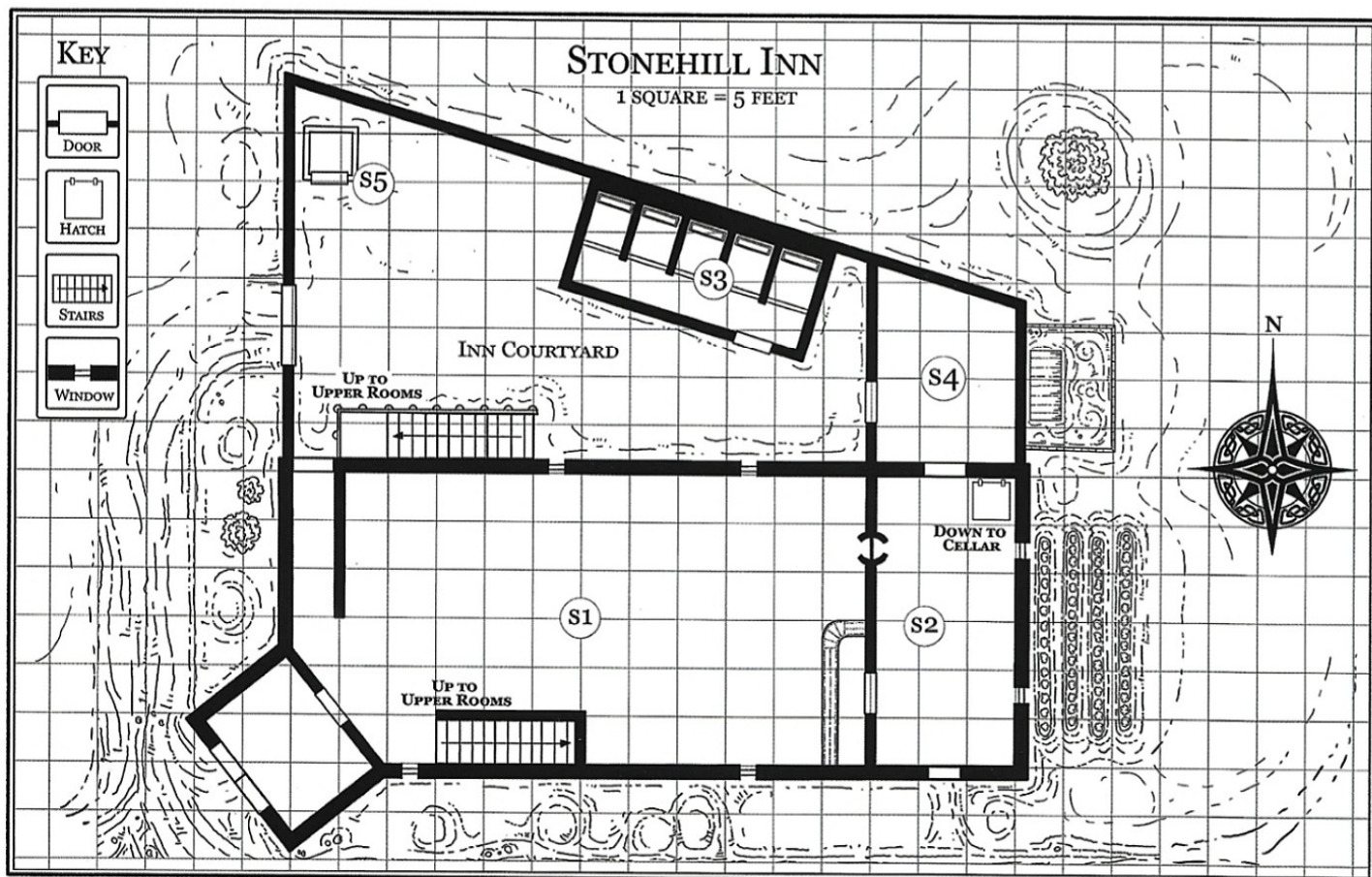
Rats. Signs of rat infestation are everywhere. Tiny wet claw prints crisscross the floor, and most surfaces are covered in droppings. Ominous scratching can be heard from below.

Windows. Windows are set with diamond-paned glass, and the sashes are not bolted. Windows on the upper floor are 11 feet above ground level.

The map below shows the layout of the premises. The stairs in the courtyard lead to the upper rooms and the stairs in the common room lead to the ale cellar (see page 4). If this is the players' first adventure together, ask them to describe their characters to the group and say how they know the other characters. When everyone is done, ask the group how they plan on approaching the inn.



Use the map as an aid to describe the location, referring to the Features box (left) for the general look and feel. Feel free to add your own embellishments! Don't forget to roleplay the NPCs (such as Toblen Stonehill) that the characters meet along the way.



KEYED LOCATIONS

S1. COMMON ROOM

The common room is in a state of disarray. If the characters make too much noise, they alert the **swarm of rats** (see stat block, page 5) in the kitchen (area S2), which surges forward to attack—meaning combat ensues.

S2. KITCHEN

The inn's cook was running dinner service when the rats attacked. Dozens of rodents are feasting on the food. This **swarm of rats** attacks any creature that disturbs it. Behind the bar, the trapdoor leading to the ale cellar (area S7) yawns open.

S3. STABLE

The stable contains a grisly spectacle—two horses devoured in their stalls by the rats. Anyone who examines the carcasses can tell that the horses were violently gnawed at by tiny animals.

S4. LARDER

The rats poured into this larder from outside. A crack near the bottom of the outer door indicates where the swarms squeezed through.

S5. PRIVY

A terrified halfling **commoner** (see stat block, page 6), Jond Lowbutton, cowers inside the privy. Jond witnessed the swarms' arrival at the inn, and he has been hiding here ever since. He's too scared to join the adventuring party and only wants to avoid being eaten.

If questioned, Jond tells the adventurers that the swarms must be guided by dark magic, as they "behaved as though someone or something were controlling them!"



If combat ensues, refer to the stat blocks and the rules in the combat booklet. Don't worry if you don't understand all the terms yet. Above all, try to keep things moving! Telling a fun story together is more important than getting hung up on rules.



Every time a player makes any decision with an uncertain outcome (e.g., do they disturb the rats in the common room?), ask them to make an ability check (i.e., roll the d20 and add the relevant ability modifier score).

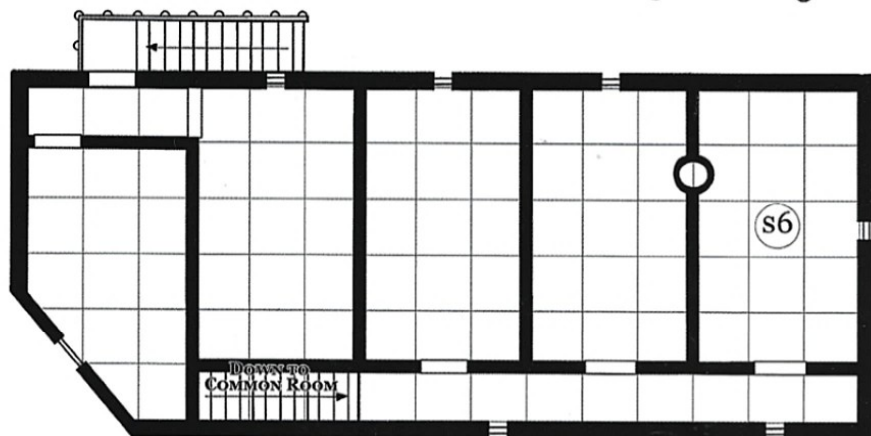
CRANIUM RATS

Devious monsters known as mind flayers create **cranium rats** (see page 6 for stats) by bombarding normal rats with psionic energy. Individually, cranium rats are no smarter than ordinary rats and behave as such. However, if enough cranium rats come together to form a swarm, they merge their minds into a single intelligence with the accumulated memories of all the swarm's constituents.

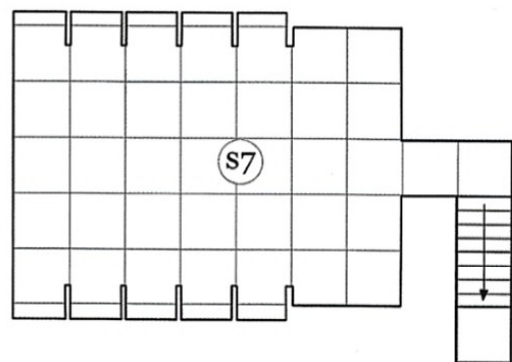
A rat separated from its swarm becomes an ordinary cranium rat with heightened intelligence, but slowly loses its intelligence over time unless it rejoins the swarm. The cranium rats in this encounter are made from recently separated cranium rats: not numerous enough to form a full swarm, but still clever enough to channel their telepathic energies into commanding lesser swarms of normal rats.

DOWN TO
COURTYARD

1 SQUARE = 5 FEET



UPPER FLOOR



ALE CELLAR

S6. UPPER ROOMS

Each of these guest rooms contains a bed, dresser and storage trunk. The northeast room is inhabited by eight mangy **cranium rats** (see *stat block*, page 6) and six prisoners.

The cranium rats have knotted their tails together to form a single "Rat King". While their tails are knotted, the rats cannot move or attack. The terrified prisoners kneel in a circle around the Rat King as it psychically interrogates them.

If the characters enter here, the Rat King telepathically challenges them, threatening to kill the prisoners if the characters don't leave at once. The rats telepathically "speak" as one creature, referring to themselves using the collective pronouns "we" and "us". If questioned about their motives, the rats reveal that there is "something buried deep below that our master wants".

To defend themselves, the cranium rats can telepathically summon any rat swarms still present in the inn. Killing a cranium rat causes the others to disentangle their tails and flee.

Prisoners. The prisoners, all **commoners**, include the innkeeper Toblen Stonehill, his cook and four guests. If Toblen is freed, he

promises the adventurers a reward for clearing the rats from his inn (see "Ending the Adventure"). He also hands them two *potions of healing*. Any prisoner can reveal that the Rat King was questioning them about a long-lost barrow beneath the inn...

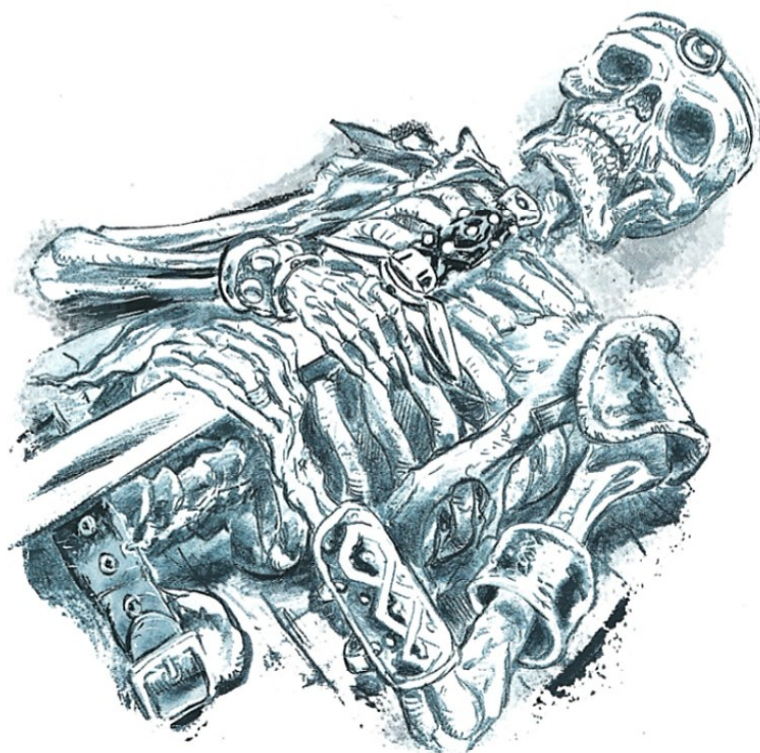
S7. ALE CELLAR

The ale cellar contains two **swarms of rats**, which are gnawing and scratching away at the dirt floor. When the adventurers arrive, the rats have excavated a 4-foot-deep pit. The swarms attack anyone who disturbs their work.

Buried Chieftain. A long-dead chieftain is buried five feet under the floor in a stone-lined tomb. His skeletal remains clutch a magic longsword engraved with runes (see "Ending the Adventure").

TOBLEN STONEHILL

The proprietor of the inn is a short, friendly male human named Toblen Stonehill. Toblen is a native of the town of Triboar to the east. He came to Phandalin to prospect, but soon realised that he knew a lot more about running an inn than he did about mining. The new town offered a good opportunity to become established. Toblen has a wife, Trilena, and a twelve-year-old son, Pip, both of whom are currently visiting relatives in Triboar. The Stonehills have comfortably weathered the changeable times in Phandalin since building the inn more than five years ago.



ENDING THE ENCOUNTER

If the adventurers free the innkeeper from captivity and rid the inn of rats, they are awarded 100 gold pieces. Adventurers who exhume the buried chieftain can claim his magic sword!

POTION OF HEALING (COMMON)

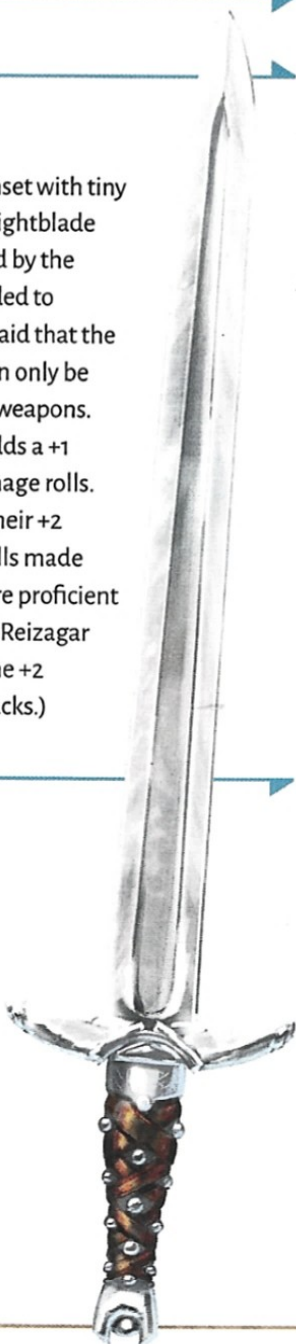
A character regains $2d4 + 2$ hit points when they spend an action and drink this potion. A character may also use their action to feed the potion to an unconscious character.



BRIGHTBLADE

The grip of this longsword is inset with tiny glass orbs that glow faintly. Brightblade was one of many blades forged by the elves of Iliyanbrien and awarded to trusted friends and allies. It's said that the hidden cities of Iliyanbrien can only be found by those wielding such weapons.

Anyone using the sword adds a +1 bonus to their attack and damage rolls. (Eirina and Crantor also add their +2 proficiency bonus to attack rolls made with this sword because they're proficient with longswords. Merovich or Reizagar can also use it but don't add the +2 proficiency bonus to their attacks.)



DM TOP TIP

At the end of the encounter, ask the players to divide any gold between them. If they found the sword, it's best to assign it to a front-line character such as a fighter.

CREATURE STAT BLOCKS

DM TOP TIP

If you've read through the Character Creation section, you'll recognise some of the data that makes up the creatures below. We'll explore creature stat blocks more fully in a future issue.

A monster can move this far on its turn. It can take one action at any point during this movement.

When a monster reaches zero hit points, it dies.

In combat, an attack roll must equal or exceed this number to hit the target.

Alignment refers to a creature's moral and personal attitudes. "Unaligned" means they don't have alignment as they lack the capacity for rational thought. We'll take a closer look at alignment in a future article.

SWARM OF RATS

Medium Swarm of Tiny Beasts, Unaligned

Armour Class 10

Hit Points 24 (7d8 - 7)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	3 (-4)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, grappled, paralysed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned

Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Proficiency Bonus +2

Keen Smell. The swarm has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny rat. The swarm can't regain hit points.

ACTIONS

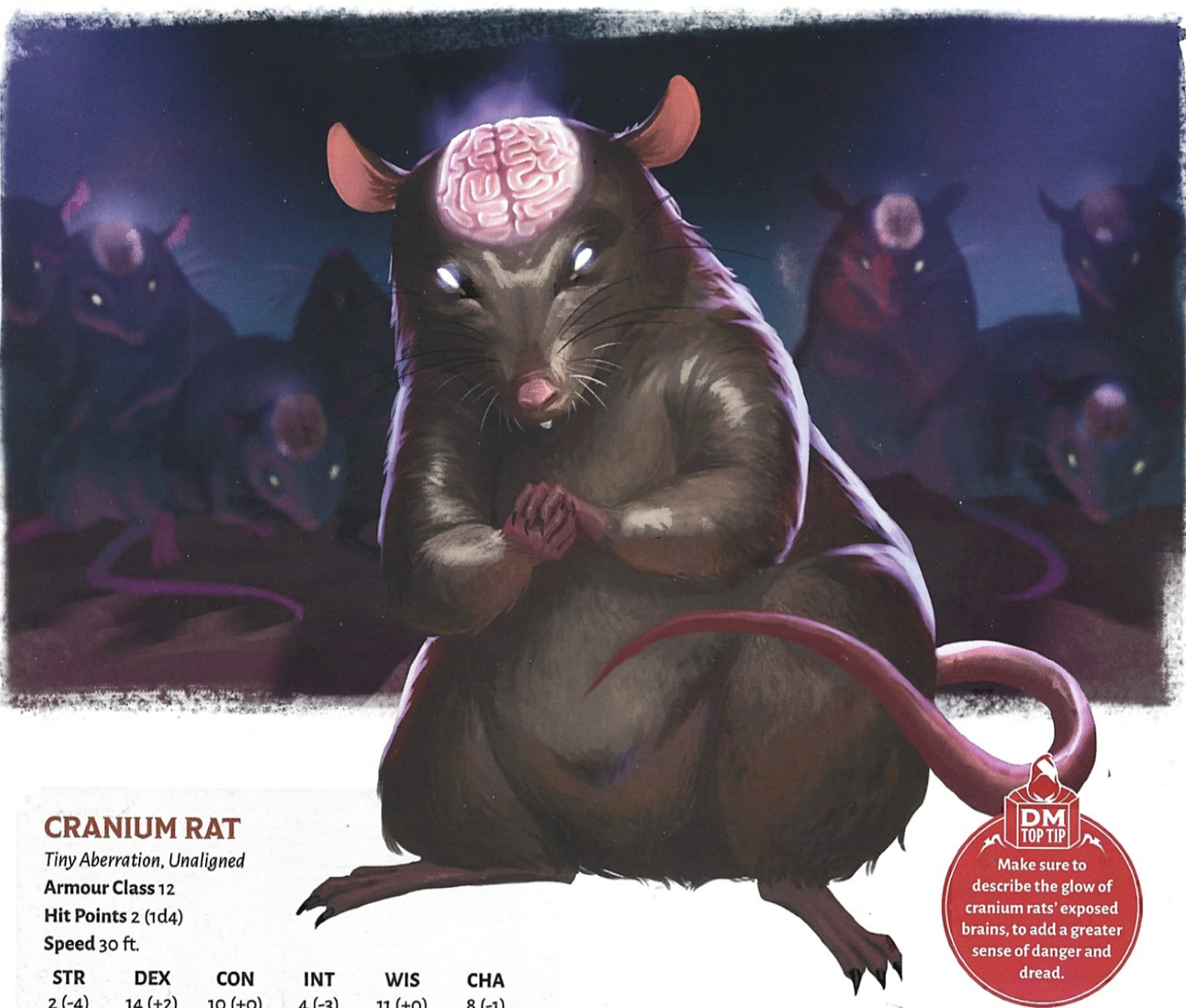
Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space.

Hit: 7 (2d6) piercing damage, or 3 (1d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

In combat, a monster takes one action on its turn.

If a monster has resistance to a damage type, reduce that damage by half (round down).

This monster cannot be affected by these conditions. Don't worry about conditions for now; they have a big impact on combat, but the player characters have no way to inflict them on foes yet.



CRANIUM RAT

Tiny Aberration, Unaligned

Armour Class 12

Hit Points 2 (1d4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (-4)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	4 (-3)	11 (+0)	8 (-1)

Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages telepathy 30 ft.

Proficiency Bonus +2

Telepathic Shroud. The cranium rat is immune to any effect that would sense its emotions or read its thoughts, as well as to all divination spells.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 1 piercing damage.

BONUS ACTIONS

Illumination. As a bonus action, the cranium rat can shed dim light from its brain in a 5-foot radius or extinguish the light.



Make sure to describe the glow of cranium rats' exposed brains, to add a greater sense of danger and dread.

COMMONER

Medium Humanoid (Any Species), Any Alignment

Armour Class 10

Hit Points 4 (1d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses Passive Perception 10

Languages Any one language (usually Common)

Proficiency Bonus +2

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.